

1 **Title:**

2 **PARbars: cheap, easy to build ceptometers for continuous measurement of light interception**
3 **in plant canopies**

4
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37
38 **Keywords:**

39 Canopy, ceptometer, photosynthetically active radiation, plant area index, phenotyping,
40 transmittance.

41
42 **Short Abstract:**

43 Detailed instructions on how to build, calibrate and collect research quality data from PARbar
44 ceptometers are presented.

45 **Long Abstract:**

46 Ceptometry is a technique used to measure the transmittance of photosynthetically active
47 radiation through a plant canopy using multiple light sensors connected in parallel on a long
48 bar. Ceptometry is often used to infer properties of canopy structure and light interception,
49 notably leaf area index (LAI) and effective plant area index (PAI_{eff}). Due to the high cost of
50 commercially available ceptometers, the number of measurements that can be taken is often
51 limited in space and time. This limits the usefulness of ceptometry for studying genetic
52 variability in light interception, and precludes thorough analysis of, and correction for, biases
53 that can skew measurements depending on the time of day. We developed continuously
54 logging ceptometers (called PARbars) that can be produced for USD \$75 each and yield high
55 quality data comparable to commercially available alternatives. Here we provide detailed
56 instruction on how to build and calibrate PARbars, how to deploy them in the field and how to
57 estimate PAI from collected transmittance data. We provide representative results from wheat
58 canopies and discuss further considerations that should be made when using PARbars.

59

60 **Introduction:**

61 Ceptometers (linear arrays of light sensors) are used to measure the proportion of
62 photosynthetically active radiation (PAR) intercepted by plant canopies. Ceptometers are used
63 widely for agricultural crop research due to the relatively straightforward nature of
64 measurements and simplicity of data interpretation. The basic principle of ceptometry is that
65 transmittance of light to the base of a plant canopy (τ) is dependent on the projected area of
66 light absorbing materials above. Measurements of PAR above and below the canopy can
67 therefore be used to estimate canopy traits such as leaf area index (LAI) and effective plant
68 area index (PAI_{eff}) (which includes stems, culms and reproductive structures in addition to
69 leaves)¹⁻³. Reliability of PAI_{eff} estimates inferred from τ is improved by modelling the effects of
70 the beam fraction of incoming PAR (f_b), the leaf absorptance (a) and the effective canopy
71 extinction coefficient (K); K in turn depends on both the solar zenith angle (θ) and the leaf angle
72 distribution (χ)^{1,4-6}. It is common practice to correct for these effects. However, there are other
73 biases that have not received due consideration in the past due to methodological and cost
74 limitations.

75

76 We recently identified significant time-dependent bias in instantaneous ceptometry
77 measurements of row crops, such as wheat and barley⁷. This bias is caused by an interaction
78 between row planting orientation and solar zenith angle. To overcome this bias, continuously
79 logging ceptometers can be mounted in the field to monitor diurnal cycles of canopy light
80 interception and then daily averages of τ and PAI_{eff} can be calculated. However, continuous
81 measurements are often unfeasible due to the prohibitively high cost of commercially available
82 ceptometers – often several thousand US dollars for a single instrument – and the requirement
83 for measurements of many field plots. The latter is particularly evident in the ‘-omics’ era
84 where many hundreds of genotypes are required for genomic analyses, such as genome wide
85 association studies (GWAS) and genomic selection (GS) (for review see Huang & Han, 2014⁸).
86 We recognised that there was a need for cost-effective ceptometers that could be produced in
87 large numbers and be used for continuous measurements across many genotypes.

88

89 As a solution we designed easy-to-build, high-accuracy ceptometers (PARbars) at a cost of USD
90 \$75 per unit. PARbars are built using 50 photodiodes that are sensitive only in the PAR
91 waveband (wavelengths 390 – 700 nm), with very little sensitivity outside this range, negating
92 the use of costly filters. The photodiodes are connected in parallel across a 1 m length to
93 produce an integrated differential voltage signal that can be recorded with a datalogger. The
94 circuitry is encased in epoxy for waterproofing and the sensors operate over a large
95 temperature range (-40 to +80°C), allowing the PARbars to be deployed in the field for
96 extended periods of time. With the exception of the photodiodes and a low-temperature-
97 coefficient resistor, all parts required to build a PARbar can be purchased from a hardware
98 store. A full list of required parts and tools is provided in Table 1. Here we present detailed
99 instructions on how to build and use PARbars for estimation of PAI_{eff} and present
100 representative results from wheat canopies.

101

102 **Protocol:**

103 **1. Building and calibrating the PARbars**

104 1.1) Gather all parts and tools required for assembly in a clean workspace. Note that PARbars
105 can also be produced in batches due to long curing times required at certain points. Note that
106 schematics of a PARbar can be found in Figure 1 for reference.

107

108 1.2) Drill a 4 mm diameter hole 20 mm from each end of an acrylic diffuser bar (1200 mm
109 length x 30 mm width x 4.5 mm thickness; 445 – Opal White; Plastix Australia Pty. Ltd.,
110 Arncliffe, NSW, Australia). Drill and tap threaded holes in a section of aluminium U-bar to
111 secure diffuser, 20 mm from each end. Drill and tap threaded holes to suit mounting hardware
112 (e.g., a tripod mounting plate).

113

114 1.3) Generally, bare copper wire comes on a roll and needs to be straightened before it can be
115 used in the PARbar circuit. Secure one end of a 1.25 m length of wire (1.25 mm diameter) into a
116 vice or clamp and tighten the other end into the grips of a hand drill. Turn on the drill to
117 straighten the wire. Repeat with a second 1.25 m length of bare copper wire.

118

119 1.4) Mark the intended locations of the copper wire and the photodiodes along the edge of the
120 diffuser using a fine-tip permanent marker (full schematics can be found in Figure 1).

121

122 1.5) Superglue one of the straightened copper wires to the diffuser. Super glue 50 photodiodes
123 (EAALSDSY6444AO; Everlight Americas Inc., Carrollton, Texas) face-down along the diffuser at
124 20 mm intervals, ensuring that they are in the centre of the diffuser and that all are arranged all
125 in the same orientation such that the large tab sits on the copper wire. Super glue the other
126 copper wire to the diffuser, such that it sits underneath the smaller tabs of the photodiodes.

127

128 1.6) Apply some solder flux to the photodiode tabs and solder the photodiodes to the copper
129 wires. Test solder connections by shining a light onto each photodiode individually and checking
130 for a voltage signal across the wires using a multimeter.

131

132 1.7) Solder a 1.5 Ω resistor in parallel across the copper wires, this will produce a linear
133 quantum response (*this step is optional, if resistor is not soldered into the PARbar, it can instead*
134 *be connected in parallel with the PARbar signal inputs on the datalogger*). Low temperature
135 coefficient precision resistors should be used to prevent ambient temperature from influencing
136 the voltage signal at a given light level.

137
138 1.8) Solder the male end of a waterproof DC connector (ADA743; Core Electronics, Adamstown,
139 NSW, Australia) to the ends of the copper wire and seal the connections using glue lined heat
140 shrink tubing.

141
142 1.9) Using silicone sealant, create a continuous silicone barrier around the circuitry to form a
143 fluid-tight well. Once the sealant has cured, fill the well with epoxy resin (651 – Universal Epoxy
144 Potting Resin; Solid Solutions, East Bentleigh, VIC, Australia).

145
146 1.10) When the epoxy resin has hardened (overnight), remove the silicone sealant using a razor
147 blade. Bolt the diffuser to the pre-threaded aluminium U-bar using M4 bolts.

148
149 1.11) Use masking tape to secure the diffuser to the aluminium along its whole length and fill
150 the space inside the ceptometer with polyurethane foam filler. Once the foam filler has set
151 (overnight), remove the masking tape. The ceptometer is now complete.

152
153 1.12) Solder the female end of the DC connector to a length of two-conductor cable, which will
154 be connected to the datalogger, and seal the connections with glue lined heat shrink.

155
156 1.13) The PARbar should be calibrated against a quantum sensor (such as LI-190R; LI-COR,
157 Lincoln, Nebraska, USA). Connect both sensors to a datalogger (such as CR5000; Campbell
158 Scientific, Logan, Utah, USA) and set them outside in full sun on a level plane (level with a spirit
159 level or spirit bubble). Log the outputs of both sensors for a full diurnal cycle. Plot a calibration
160 curve (such as Figure 2) to convert the raw voltage signal from the PARbars to PAR using the
161 quantum sensor output.

162 163 **2. Installation in the field**

164 2.1) To infer PAI_{eff} , one PARbar (or quantum sensor) should be set up above the canopy with
165 the other PARbars inserted below the canopy at a 45° angle to row planting. The PARbar above
166 the canopy can be mounted on a tripod. All PARbars should be levelled using a spirit level or
167 bubble. It is strongly encouraged that data is sampled across a full diurnal cycle due to time
168 dependent bias of instantaneous measurements⁷.

169
170 2.2) Connect the PARbars to a datalogger using cables made in step 1.11 and commence logging
171 at desired sampling interval. Remember to connect each in parallel with a 1.5 Ω low
172 temperature coefficient precision shunt resistor if this was not integrated into the PARbar
173 design.

174

175 2.3) Collect data from the datalogger and transfer to a computer. Differential voltage data can
176 be converted to PAR using the calibration for each PARbar.

177

178 3. Calculation of effective plant area index (PAI_{eff})

179 3.1) PAI_{eff} can be calculated for each time point in the dataset using the following equations
180 (provided in the manual for the AccuPAR LP-80 ceptometer; Decagon Inc., Pullman, WA, USA⁶):

181

$$182 \quad (1) \quad \text{PAI} = \frac{(1-1/2K)f_b-1}{A(1-0.47f_b)} \ln \tau ,$$

183

184 where $A = 0.283 + 0.0785a - 0.159a^2$ (in which a is leaf absorbance), τ is the ratio of below- to
185 above-canopy PAR, and K and f_b are modelled by Equation 2⁴ and Equation 3⁹, respectively:

186

$$187 \quad (2) \quad K = \frac{(\chi^2 + \tan^2 \theta)^{0.5}}{\chi + 1.744(\chi + 1.182)^{-0.733}} ,$$

188

189 where χ is a dimensionless parameter describing leaf angle distribution, θ is the solar zenith
190 angle, and

191

$$192 \quad (3) \quad f_b = 1.395 + r \left(-14.43 + r \left(48.57 + r \left(-59.024 + 24.835 \cdot r \right) \right) \right) ,$$

193

194 where r is PAR above the canopy (PAR_{above}) as a fraction of its maximum possible value
195 (PAR_{above,max} = 2550 · cos θ); i.e. $r = \text{PAR}_{\text{above}} / \text{PAR}_{\text{above,max}}$. For wheat we assumed $a = 0.9$ and $\chi =$
196 0.96 (the latter value was given for wheat by Campbell and van Evert (1994)¹⁰). An R script is
197 provided as a supplementary file for automated processing of large datasets.

198

199 Representative results:

200 A representative calibration curve for a PARbar is shown in Figure 2. The differential voltage
201 output of a PARbar is linearly proportional to the PAR output from a quantum sensor, with $R^2 =$
202 0.9998. PARbars were deployed in wheat canopies and logged every 20 s across the
203 development of the plants. A typical diurnal timecourse of the canopy light environment
204 collected using a PARbar on a clear sunny day is shown in Figure 3 (raw transmittance data and
205 corrected PAI are shown for comparison). Figures 3b and 3c demonstrate the bias that could be
206 introduced by taking instantaneous ceptometer measurements at various times of day (as per
207 Salter *et al.* 2018⁷). The wheat plots used for the collection of this data had a row planting
208 orientation due north-south with transmission of light to the lower canopy peaking at 12:30
209 (Figure 3b). If an instantaneous measurement were to be taken at this point, PAI would be
210 underestimated whilst if it was taken in the morning or afternoon it may be overestimated. The
211 weatherproof PARbars can also be deployed in the field for longer time periods; Figure 4
212 demonstrates how the PARbars could be used to monitor how canopy light environment
213 changes as the plants develop.

214

215 **Table 1.** Components and tools required to build a PARbar ceptometer. Note that the
216 photodiode is a specific component, and it is essential that it is used due to its spectral

217 response. All other parts can be obtained from hardware and electronics suppliers, and suitable
218 alternatives to the part numbers stated could be used.

219

220 **Figure 1.** Schematics for the PARbar build. (a) highlights the location and arrangement of the
221 waterproof connector and the internal shunt resistor; (b) highlights the arrangement and
222 spacing of the photodiodes; (c) highlights the drilling locations on the acrylic diffuser bar; (d)
223 highlights the drilling locations on the aluminium U-bar; and (e) shows an electronic circuit
224 diagram of a PARbar.

225

226 **Figure 2.** A representative PARbar calibration curve, showing the relationship between the
227 differential voltage output of a PARbar and the photosynthetic photon flux density from a LI-
228 COR LI-190R quantum sensor.

229

230 **Figure 3.** Representative daily timecourse data collected on a clear day using PARbars in wheat
231 canopies at anthesis in Canberra, Australia ($-35^{\circ}12'00.1008''$, $149^{\circ}05'17.0988''$). (a) shows the
232 PAR measured above the canopy, (b) the uncorrected transmittance data (i.e.
233 PAR_{above}/PAR_{below}), and (c) the effective plant area index (PAI_{eff}), corrected for the beam fraction
234 of incoming PAR (f_b), the leaf absorptance (a) and canopy extinction coefficient (K). Data points
235 shown in (b) and (c) are means ($n = 30$), solid lines are LOESS local regressions fitted in R ($\alpha =$
236 0.5), shaded areas are standard errors of the fit and the dashed horizontal lines represent the
237 daily means. The shaded area between the dotted lines is the time window (1100 – 1400h)
238 recommended for instantaneous ceptometer measurements in wheat by CIMMYT¹¹.

239

240 **Figure 4.** Representative data collected across a growing season (from early tillering to
241 anthesis) using PARbars deployed in wheat canopies in Canberra, Australia ($-35^{\circ}12'00.1008''$,
242 $149^{\circ}05'17.0988''$). (a) shows the uncorrected transmittance data and (b) the effective plant
243 area index, corrected for the beam fraction of incoming PAR (f_b), the leaf absorptance (a) and
244 canopy extinction coefficient (K). Data points shown represent daily means for the period 1000
245 – 1400h ($n = 30$). Solid lines are LOESS local regressions fitted in R ($\alpha = 0.75$), shaded areas are
246 standard errors of the fit. Raw data was not included in further analysis if PAR_{above} was < 1500
247 $\mu\text{mol m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$ and if PAR_{below}/PAR_{above} was > 1 .

248

249 **Discussion:**

250 The quality of data collected with PARbars make them an alternative to expensive commercial
251 ceptometers, yielding an $R^2 > 0.99$ when calibrated against a LI-COR Li-190R quantum sensor
252 (Figure 2). Similar high correlations were found for 68 PARbars used in previous work⁷. As with
253 most commercial light sensors, calibrations differ among PARbars so their output must be
254 converted using their specific individual calibrations. Recently, there has been a growing
255 interest in novel high-throughput plant phenotyping technologies for the estimation of canopy
256 traits (for review see Yang *et al.*, 2017¹²). Whilst these methods are promising in that they
257 produce huge amounts of data they are typically very indirect and require validation against
258 conventional techniques. PARbars could serve as a cost-effective, ground-based validation tool
259 for these new techniques.

260

261 Our previous work⁷ highlighted that continuous ceptometry measurements across diurnal
262 cycles are required for reliable estimation of PAI of row crop canopies, due to interactions
263 between solar zenith and row-planting orientation that could bias instantaneous
264 measurements. This can also be seen in Figure 3. The low production cost of PARbars make
265 them a viable option for continuous measurements in the field. With sufficient numbers of
266 PARbars, continuous measurements can be performed in all field plots. Alternatively, PARbars
267 can provide continuous measurements in just a few plots in order to characterize row-
268 orientation biases to develop time-specific correction functions for instantaneous
269 measurements (for more information see Salter et al. 2018⁷). Another key benefit of using
270 continuous ceptometry is the ability to capture short fluctuations in τ over time (sunflecks and
271 shade flecks), caused by clouds passing overhead, movement of the canopy, etc. Photosynthesis
272 is known to be highly sensitive to small changes in environmental conditions and ‘dynamic’
273 changes in photosynthesis are now thought to be important in driving crop yield (for review see
274 Murchie *et al.*, 2018¹³). PARbars installed in the field with a suitably short logging interval could
275 be used to capture these short fluctuations and provide better understanding of the dynamic
276 nature of plant canopies.

277
278 PARbars can also be installed in the field for extended periods of time, as shown in the example
279 in Figure 4. One notable exclusion from the current PARbar design that could be considered for
280 long-term monitoring is a means to distinguish between direct beam and diffuse components of
281 incoming PAR above the canopy. As diffuse radiation penetrates deeper into the canopy than
282 direct sunlight¹⁴, transmittance will be increased and PAI_{eff} will be underestimated. When all
283 radiation is diffuse, PAI is directly proportional to the logarithm of $1/\tau$ rather than the
284 relationship shown in Equation 1¹⁵. The lack of a diffuse component in the data processing
285 steps used in this study may explain some of the day-to-day variation in the data shown in
286 Figure 4. It is possible to find diffuse/direct radiation data in some open access datasets but due
287 to the localised nature of environmental variables that influence incoming PAR (clouds, air
288 pollution, etc.) they are often not applicable to ceptometry data. Cruse *et al.* (2015)¹⁶ noted
289 that currently available commercial instruments that can measure direct and diffuse PAR are
290 expensive and require regular maintenance, so they designed a simple and cheap apparatus to
291 address this issue. Their system consists of a quantum sensor that is routinely shaded by a
292 motorised, moving shadowband and allows for continuous measurement of total, direct and
293 diffuse PAR. The sensor used in the Cruse *et al.*¹⁶ system could be replaced with the same
294 photodiode used in PARbars to further reduce cost, and may be easily incorporated into the
295 existing PARbar setup. These measurements could be integrated into the data processing
296 pipeline and would further enhance reliability of estimates of PAI_{eff} .

297
298 The PARbars that we present in this paper were designed specifically for use in row crops, such
299 as wheat and barley, but the handmade design could easily be modified for a user’s specific
300 requirements. For example, the shunt resistor could be changed to provide linearity at lower
301 PAR ranges, or for versatility a low-temperature coefficient precision potentiometer could be
302 used to change the linear range as necessary. The photodiodes could also be used individually
303 as quantum sensors, allowing the user to capture spatial as well as temporal variation within
304 individual canopies for a much lower cost than would have been possible previously. This could

305 be of particular importance given the growing focus on dynamic photosynthesis under
306 fluctuating light conditions.

307
308 Although we used a conventional (and expensive) datalogger for the data presented in this
309 study, there is scope for dataloggers to also be built using off-the-shelf componentry, enabling
310 the creation of a combined ceptomety and datalogger system on a limited budget. The
311 popularity of so-called 'maker' platforms, such as Arduino and Raspberry Pi, offer great promise
312 in this area and one might consider the use of the open-source Arduino-based Cave Pearl
313 project¹⁷ as a starter for further development. The Cave Pearl dataloggers were designed for
314 environmental monitoring of cave ecosystems so ruggedness and low power demand were key
315 considerations in their design. Similar considerations are relevant for implementation to plant
316 phenotyping work. The cost of the components required for the Cave Pearl datalogger is less
317 than USD \$50 per unit and due to the small size of the circuit boards used in this project,
318 datalogging could be directly incorporated into future design of PARbars.

319
320 PARbars provide a cost-effective and high-accuracy alternative to commercially available
321 ceptometers. They do not require specialist expertise to build, nor for the interpretation of
322 resulting data. Consequently, PARbars could be widely adopted in the plant phenotyping
323 community – including by those who generally use expensive light sensing tools and those who
324 have been unable to access such technology due to budget restrictions. The 'do-it-yourself'
325 nature of PARbars means that they could be adapted to a user's specific needs with added
326 flexibility for future development and adaptation of this technology for a range of purposes.

327

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336

337 **Disclosures:**

338 The authors confirm that they have no conflicts of interest and nothing to disclose.

339

340 **References:**

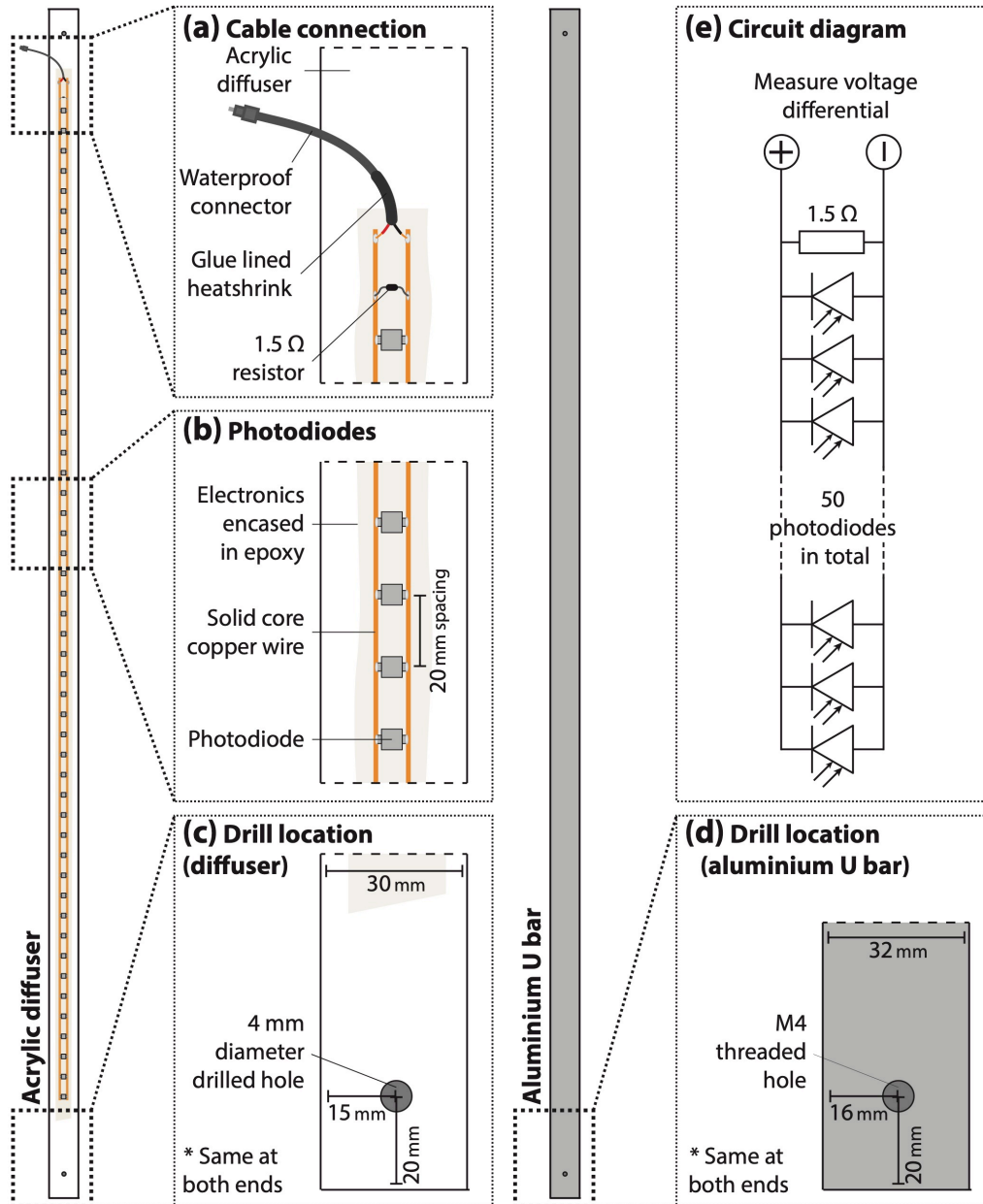
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- 385

386 **Tables:**
387 **Table 1**

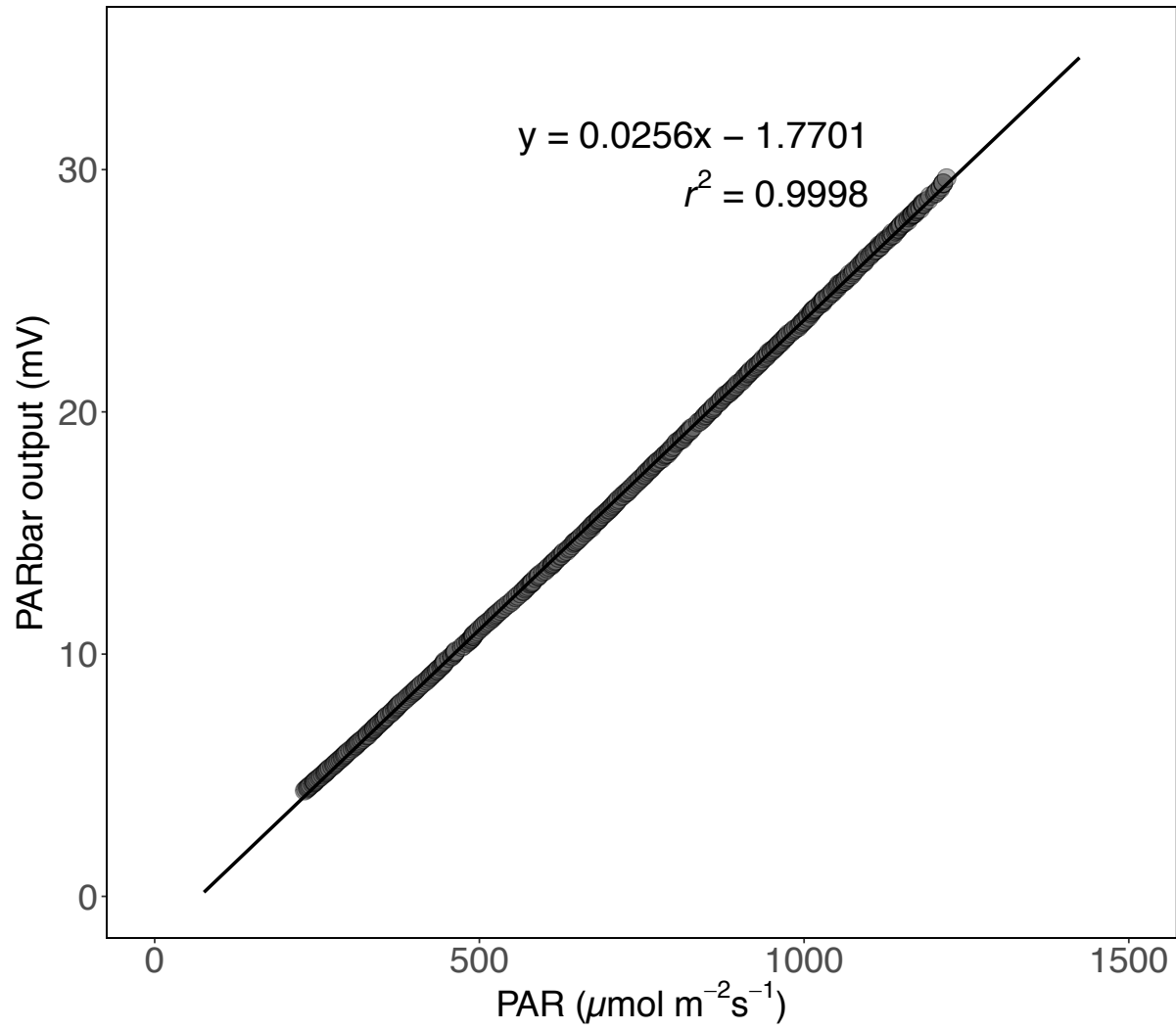
Specifics - essential that this part is used due to the spectral response of this sensor				
Component	Number	Information	Part number	Link
Photodiode	50	It is important that this specific component is used due to spectral response.	Everlight Americas, EAALSDSY6444A	https://bit.ly/2FzVnuH
Generic - alternative parts could be used here				
Component	Number	Information	Part number	Link
1.5 Ω precision resistor	1	Could be made using multiple larger resistors in parallel but they need to have low temperature coefficient (i.e. ± 3 ppm/°C).	TE Connectivity, UPW25 series	https://bit.ly/2DFuPpm
Acrylic diffuser bar	1	1200 mm length x 30 mm width x 4.5 mm thick	Plastix, 445 - Opal White	https://bit.ly/2Bq0fyc
Waterproof connectors	1	2-conductor waterproof connector. DC power connectors work well.	Core Electronics, ADA743	https://bit.ly/2Brcrik
Clear epoxy potting resin		Clear epoxy resin for electrical applications	Solid Solutions, 651 - Universal Epoxy Potting Resin	https://bit.ly/2qYOpHa
Aluminium U-bar	1	1220 mm length x 35 mm width x 25 mm depth	Capral, EK9160	https://bit.ly/2PPfJou
Bare solid core copper wire	2	1 m lengths; 1.15 mm thickness. Straightened by securing one end in a vice and the other in a drill.		
Bolts	2	30 mm M4		
Two-conductor cable		Heavy duty as the PARbars will be used outdoors.		
Glue lined heat shrink		Various sizes		
Solder and flux		Any suitable		
Super glue		Low viscosity formulations preferred		
Foam filler		Any suitable		
Tools and other consumables required				
Soldering iron		Clamps		
Heat gun		LED torch		
Drill (or drill press)		Voltmeter		
Tap and die set		Masking tape		
Screwdriver		Silicone sealant		
Spirit level/bubble				

389 **Figures:**
390 **Figure 1**
391



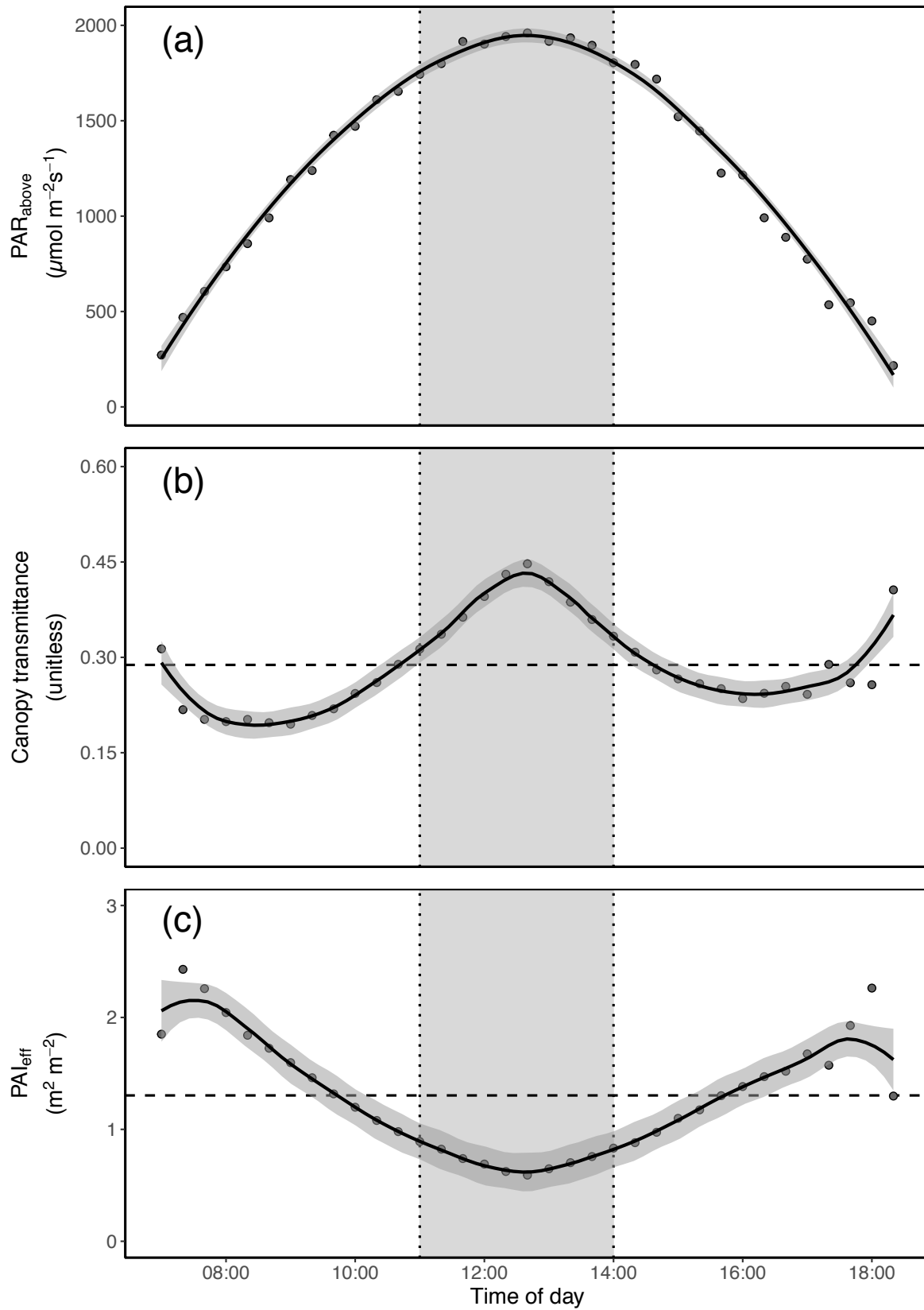
392

393 **Figure 2**



394
395

396 **Figure 3**



397
398

399 **Figure 4**

